



# Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702

## FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:

Chris Smith, Public Affairs Officer

(727) 570-5301, Pager 888-955-4854

David Bernhart or Dennis Klemm, Protected Resources Specialists

(727) 570-5312

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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### **NOAA Fisheries Requests Shrimp Trawlers in South Atlantic Waters to Use Modified TEDs to Protect Migrating Endangered Leatherback Sea Turtles** *Emergency Rule Set to Expire after May 24*

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) requests that shrimpers trawling in south Atlantic waters use turtle excluder devices (TEDs) that are modified to have an opening large enough for leatherbacks to escape. The current emergency restrictions requiring modified TEDs in all inshore waters and offshore waters 10 nautical miles seaward of the COLREGS demarcation line, bounded by 32° N. lat. (approximately Tybee Island, GA) and 34° N. lat. (approximately Wilmington Beach, NC) within the Leatherback Conservation Zone expires at 11:59 p.m. May 24. Follow-up surveys conducted on May 15 and 21, 2002, have shown that large numbers of leatherback turtles continue to occur in these waters and that such restrictions are necessary to protect the leatherback turtles. However, administrative issues have precluded the ability to enact another emergency extension prior to the expiration of the current emergency rule for that area. Off Georgia, where the leatherback emergency rule expired after May 3, weather and other problems have not allowed for effective follow-up surveys, but it is expected that leatherback sea turtles are still occurring in that area as well. In addition, extremely high levels of strandings of various sea turtle species, including leatherback sea turtles, have occurred along the Georgia coast during a period beginning May 5, 2002. NOAA Fisheries is currently considering emergency action in the area to protect sea turtles. NOAA Fisheries is therefore urging shrimpers in the south Atlantic to comply with this request. Use of the larger-opening TEDs will protect leatherback sea turtles and save shrimpers the trouble of having to reinstall the larger TEDs within the next week or so, when additional emergency rules are likely to be enacted.

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NOAA Fisheries is an agency of the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The agency conducts scientific research and provides services and products to support fisheries management, fisheries development, trade and industry assistance, enforcement, and protected species and habitat conservation programs.